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## And The Oscar Goes To

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# And The Oscar Goes To

## **Writing Process**

For my English 100 class, my professor required us to write a comparative rhetoric paper. We were given complete control over what kind of media we wanted to be the focus of our paper and what we topic we wanted to write about. I chose to write about the movie *Spotlight*, the recent Academy Award winning film that followed the investigative team that uncovered the priest pedophilia scandal in Boston in 2002. I had recently viewed the film and it had an enormous impact on me as a young Catholic attending a Catholic Marianist university. I chose for media two review and responses on the film; one from the National Catholic Reporter and one from the Washington Post. Both media outlets differ in many ways, however I was able to find commonality between them. These similarities and differences allowed me to form an excellent contrast between both articles and the rhetoric within them, while keeping the immoral actions of these clergymen as the center of the paper.

## **Course**

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### And the Oscar Goes To\*

On January 6, 2002, the Boston Globe published a story that unveiled the priest pedophilia scandal concentrated in the Archdiocese of Boston (Rezendes). *Spotlight*, a film released on November 6, 2015, follows the investigative team that uncovered the child abuse scandal. The film depicts the insular atmosphere of the Catholic Church in Boston in the early 2000s, and shows that even the reporters themselves, all of whom were raised Catholic, struggled to grasp with the scope of the abuse and the protection of priestly predators by high-ranking Church officials. Because *Spotlight* won the Oscar for Best Picture at the 2016 Academy Awards, its influence made the issue of child abuse within institutions such as the Catholic Church a relevant topic of conversation once again. Media outlets, newspapers, Catholics and other religious orders have reviewed the film and issued responses that beg the question, how has the environment within the Catholic Church changed? Two media outlets, the Washington Post, a non-religious affiliated news source and the National Catholic Reporter, a Catholic affiliated news source, released reviews and responses about the film. The two articles showcase the differences between audiences of both news sources and the different discourse communities of both audiences. However, the articles also show the commonality between both readerships on issues of morality, justice and ethics.

The National Catholic Reporter, NCR, is an independent news source published biweekly, that has been providing a voice for Catholics and other people of faith for over fifty

years (“About Us”). Father Peter Daly, the pastor of St. John Vianney in Prince Frederick, Maryland, publishes a column for NCR and wrote a review and response on *Spotlight* for the paper (Daly). His unique perspective on the film is shocking, honest and quite vulnerable. He writes to his audience with collective and inclusive pronouns like ‘we’ and ‘our’ and uses an overall personal tone of voice that stresses the shame and pain he felt while viewing the film.

The Washington Post has been a respected news source serving the Washington D.C. area for over 120 years. Published daily, the newspaper has no religious affiliations and is known to have a ‘left-wing’ approach to news reporting. Michelle Boorstein, religion reporter for The Post, delivers a non-Catholic, Jewish perspective to the film (“Michelle Boorstein”). She provides more contextual evidence and investigates how the church has changed over the past fifteen years. Quoting recent statements by bishops on the issue, citing the U.S. Catholic Church budget reports since the scandal, and including current allegations against the church, the article has an academic tone and includes a unique non-Catholic approach to the film and the child abuse scandal.

Fr. Peter Daly’s article uses language that is unique to the Catholic Church’s discourse community. Fr. Daly states, “ ‘Spotlight’ was a tragedy brought on by sins of priests and bishops ... every seminarian should see this movie. The USCCB should spend an evening watching it together and discussing it.” Referring to sin, seminarians, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Fr. Daly assumes that his audience understands this terminology because he writes for a Catholic affiliated publication. Fr. Daly includes several collective pronouns that suggest a commonality in his readers’ experiences and emotions towards the scandal and film. Daly states, “Our church behaved horribly... We are slightly more honest... We are now much

more cautious about the care of youth.” He also includes his personal feelings and emotions when he viewed the film, stating the following:

I went to see “Spotlight” by myself. I knew it would be painful to watch ... As a parish priest I found it painful to watch. I was ashamed. I went to see the movie alone. When the movie was over I sat in stunned silence in the theater and waited for everyone else to leave. I did not want to have to talk. Above all I did not want to run into any parishioners.  
(Daly)

The pastor’s personal perspective and inclusive writing style caters to the readership of the National Catholic Reporter and Catholicism as a discourse community. Catholics look to church leaders like Fr. Daly to be guides of morality and to provide open, honest dialogue with the congregation.

Contrary to Fr. Daly’s personal review of *Spotlight*, Michelle Boorstein’s article for the Washington Post uses neutral language and appeals to a wide audience of readers, regardless of religious affiliation. At the beginning of the article, she poses the question regarding the priest pedophilia scandal, how are things different in 2015? Boorstein quotes Francesco C. Cesareo, Chairman of the USCCB’s National Review Board as stating the following on the sexual abuse situation in 2015: “Sexual abuse of minors is a problem that affects many institutions in our society. In 2002, the Catholic Church recognized that it was not immune to this issue.” Boorstein also quotes Dubuque Archbishop Michael Jackels stating the following:

The sin and crime of sexual abuse sadly still happens. And while failing to report on or remove an offender is rare in comparison with past practice, it too still happens, and when it does a shadow is cast on the Church’s efforts to restore trust and to provide a safe environment. May God have mercy on us and help us. (Boorstein)

Both quotes emphasize that the church made large efforts to stop any abuse and remove offenders; however, they also exhibit the radical difference in opinions by clergymen on the current landscape of the church regarding this issue. Francesco Cesareo expresses no current responsibility by the church, but instead deflects the issue onto other institutions in society that are faced with similar abuse cases. Conversely, Archbishop Jackels recognizes the misconduct of the church and prays for help (Boorstein). Including conflicting viewpoints of clergymen, Boorstein exhibits how the church still struggles to define its identity and combat this issue as a cohesive unit almost fourteen years after the Boston pedophilia scandal was brought to light.

In her article, Boorstein also reveals the significant budget increases within the Catholic Church since the 2002 scandal. She states that the Catholic Church spends tens of millions of dollars each year on child protection efforts, more than twice as much as it did a decade ago. Also, the sexual abuse scandal continues to cost the church roughly two billion annually in charitable giving. Boorstein also includes criticism of the church regarding new scandals and victim support, stating:

In 2011, a Philadelphia grand jury accused the archdiocese of not stopping abusers and said more than three-dozen priests credibly accused of abuse or inappropriate behavior towards minors remained in ministry. Prominent survivors...have continued to criticize the church for spending millions in court against victims, including in statehouses where the church fights the lifting of statutes of limitations. (Boorstein)

Boorstein acknowledges that abuse within the church is still an issue and uses contextual evidence as support for her claim. Boorstein does not include personal perspective in the article; however, her contextual evidence provides a non-biased, holistic perspective for her readership. Her neutral writing caters to her non-religious affiliated audience and provides language that is

non-exclusive to any single discourse community. The article emphasizes that even non-Catholics are affected by and concerned with the sexual abuse that occurred within the church.

Both the Washington Post and the National Catholic Reporter include information about the progress that has been made since the *Spotlight* era. The two differing news sources find commonality in that progress has been made and future progress must continue regarding sexual abuse within the church. Fr. Daly states the following, “Many good things have happened since 2002...The truth is better known now...Many victims have been helped. There is a universal awareness of creating a safe environment for children...Parish priests, like me, have adjusted our behavior.” Fr. Daly also states that thirteen years after the scandal broke, clergymen have still not learned from this tragedy, and comments that the stigma from this scandal will continue to affect and afflict the church (Daly). Michelle Boorstein also agrees that progress has been made. She states that researchers feel that the landscape of the church today is immensely different than that of the *Spotlight* generation. She also includes that the number of credible allegations against clergymen is one-third as much as when the Boston Globe article was published. However, Boorstein warns that a steady decline in the number of accusations may be misleading. She quotes Deacon Bernie Nojadera who stated the following, “It’s like an iceberg; that what we see above. Lord knows how many are suffering or in pain. The data we have is just our marker for what we have” (Boorstein).

The unveiling of the priest pedophilia scandal in Boston in 2002 led to crucial and desperately needed reform. The film *Spotlight*, based on the investigative team that uncovered the story, has once again reopened a dialogue and made the issue of sexual abuse in societal institutions a relevant topic of conversation. The articles written in response to the movie showcase the similarities and differences between religious and non-religious affiliated news

sources. However, they also allow us as members of society to join together to prevent tragedies such as this from repeating themselves. Articles and publications like the Washington Post and the National Catholic Reporter allow us to find commonality when faced with such calamity.

\* This essay received the Barbara Farrelly Award for Best Writing of the Issue.



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